

**Fort Matanzas National Monument**  
**Monthly Resource Management Update**  
**May 31, 2012**

**Portuguese Man-O-War**

It's summertime and along with water-logged ears, sunburns, and wipeouts come more fun things that are dishing out summer tough love. Portuguese Man-O-War are in their peak for the year in number and size in the months of April and May.

It is a common misconception to call the Portuguese Man-O-War a jellyfish, when in fact it is a siphonophore. A siphonophore is a community of smaller organisms working and thriving as one. The anatomy of the Portuguese Man-O-War consists of four types of polyps, each with a different function.



The *pneumatophore* is a gas-filled bladder that allows the Man-O-War to float on the surface of the water and sail along with the winds. When threatened, the Man-O-War has the ability to deflate its bladder and descend underwater. The *dactylozoid polyp* is the part of the tentacles that captures prey. These are filled with tightly coiled barbs containing a venom meant to paralyze and kill fish and other small organisms that Man-O-War feed upon. The barbs are wound inside of nematocysts, tiny pockets that when disturbed will release the barbs. If you come into contact with a Portuguese Man-O-War, it is this polyp specifically that will administer a neurotoxin causing excruciating pain,, although rarely is the sting of a Man-O-War deadly to humans. Even beached Man-O-Wars can also deliver a sting if touched.

The third polyp is the *gastrozoid* or feeding apparatus of the tentacles. This polyp brings the food up to the mouths once the prey is paralyzed. The final polyp is for reproduction, known as the *gonozoid*. Each gonozoid contains either male or female polyps. The Man-O-War releases gametes into the water in large numbers to be fertilized. The fertilized gamete will then proceed to bud asexually in order to grow.

The size of a full grown Man-O-War varies. The float or bladder of the Man-O-War is on average about 2 inches high and 12 inches long, while the tentacles can hang up to 165 feet under the surface. The length of the tentacles allows for more area for prey to potentially swim into. So use caution when swimming or walking at the beach so as to not have a run-in with one of these. The range for Man-O-War spans the entire equatorial zone around the world. For more information on treatment of Portuguese Man-O-War stings go to: [http://www.key-biscayne.com/beach\\_park/facts/manowar.shtml](http://www.key-biscayne.com/beach_park/facts/manowar.shtml).